

WHY GERMANY ENDURES HITLER

BY S. MILES BOUTON

How could Germany descend to the depths of brutality and ruthless crushing of all human rights that have marked the course of National Socialist rule from the beginning, culminating in the barbarous murders of June 30 last and the following days? The Germans are admittedly the best educated people in the world. Their contributions to the arts and sciences have been impressive, their contributions to letters respectable. On the purely material side of civilization Germany is a good half century in advance of the rest of Europe. There are probably more bathtubs in Berlin alone than in any entire country on the Continent.

Why have not the Germans risen up against the crazed gangsters who have made the name of their fatherland a byword in the civilized world—who have placed a stain on it which a whole generation will not be able to wipe out? The history of most European countries and even of little Ireland is full of the names of voluntary martyrs, of men and women who deliberately courted death in opposing despotism. The revolution of November, 1918, in Germany produced only four genuine martyrs; two of these were Karl Liebknecht, the half-Jew, and Rosa Luxemburg, Polish Jewess; and Nazi Germany's history contains no such names. The men and women clubbed to death, "shot while trying to escape," "suicided" or slain by firing squads or murderous

Black Shirts were done to death merely because of their opinions or their race. There are millions of Germans who hate Nazism and all its works. But even at the very beginning, when resolute opposition could have availed much, they kept silent, or permitted themselves to be "co-ordinated."

The reasons for all this are to be found in German history. They have nothing to do with race or blood. The "Aryan," "Nordic Germanic" theories of Hitler and his followers are utter nonsense. The Germans are a conglomerate of many races—ancient Pruzzen, Wend, Sorb, Lithuanian, Celt, Alpine and other blood—yet the reactions and psychology of all these different races and mixtures are essentially the same in respect of the important phases of life and thought. They have been shaped in the same mold, chiefly a Prussian mold, by a common history and a common language. One notes the same process in America. Young immigrants settling in the East begin talking through their nose, chewing gum and reacting to their other surroundings precisely like native Americans within ten years. The German, smitten on the nose in Germany, calls for the police. Give him ten years in America, and he smites back.

The end of the Thirty Years' War found Germany's intellectual and cultural life all but utterly destroyed. The century produced a few men prominent in physical science, but no literary light or other

cultural leader to compare with dozens of names in France and England, which steadily increased their lead. French became the language of courtiers and the best society, and its influence grew as a result of the immigration of the Huguenots. King Frederick William I did not feel it necessary to have his children taught German. Frederick the Great wrote all his works in French, and spoke German—a very bad German—only to underlings who did not understand the more “elegant” French. Leibnitz wrote some of his principal works in French, and the same was true of other leaders of thought in his century. The only voice raised against this came from Moses Mendelssohn, the Jew, the great philosopher and great German patriot.

It must be remembered also that Prussia and almost all other German states were under absolutist rule for more than six centuries after Magna Charta had been granted the English by a reluctant King, and for three-quarters of a century after the Constitution of the United States was adopted.

II

The result of all this was that a feeling of inferiority, which had already been engendered by the backwardness of the Germans in comparison with the peoples of the kingdoms to the west, was rendered more acute. The French Revolution stirred such feelings mightily. “Liberty, fraternity, equality” across the Rhine, but absolutism and despotism at home. England had long had popular government, and across the Atlantic a new Republic had come into being, dedicated to the proposition that all men are born free and equal.

The subjugation of Prussia by Napoleon in 1806 was received by the bulk of the

people with complacency. The leading newspaper of Berlin praised the French commandant of the city, and expressed the hope that he might long continue in his post. “Rattle your chains,” said the great Goethe. “The man [Napoleon] is too strong for you.” And he entertained French officers in his home while the Prussians were under the iron heel of their conqueror. The attitude expressed by the newspaper and by Germany’s mightiest literary figure is typically German. It helps make understandable why the masses of the people have so meekly submitted to the despotism of Adolf Hitler and his lieutenants. I have pointed out in an earlier article (“Germany Sinks into Slavery,” in *THE AMERICAN MERCURY* for May) how the Germans rushed to do obeisance to the Poles after the latter’s victory at Tannenberg in 1410, how stalwart monarchists became equally stalwart republicans after the revolution of 1918, and how ardent haters of Hitler became his bootlicking sycophants after his accession to power.

As the Napoleonic yoke grew heavier, a reaction began to make itself felt among the more articulate part of the nation. Only a little more than a century earlier French troops had ravaged the Palatinate. The general level of well-being was still lower at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century than in 1618. And now a foreign conqueror held the country. Why all this series of catastrophes? Could it be due to defects in the German character? Obviously no German could admit that. The real reason could only be that the Germans were a people of such surpassing excellence and generally superior qualities that they had become the objects of envy for all other—naturally inferior—peoples.

This was the genesis of that arrogant boasting which I described in the article

referred to above—that the whole world would some day “regain health through the German character”; that the coming Federation of Europe would fly the German flag “because all that is great, fundamental and eternal in every European institution is German”; that it is the Germans’ mission “to civilize the earth”; and hundreds of other equally arrogant boasts, which have continued down to today and even grown more boastful, so that we hear the cherublike Dr. Frank, the youthful Nazi Minister of Justice, proclaiming that “the blood-substance of the Germanic race constitutes so preëminent and unique an asset of the world as a whole that we can justly regard it as the duty of the entire human race to safeguard this basic German element out of gratitude.”

The defeat of Napoleon, although accomplished only with the aid of the Russians, gave a tremendous impulse to this arrogance, and then came Gobineau, the Frenchman who, trying to establish his descent from the Vikings, published his essay on the inequality of human races. And the Germans learned that they were even better than they had supposed. The “Germanic Aryans,” it appeared, were the sole originators and furtherers of civilization and culture. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the Germanicized Englishman, carried on the work, and under Hitler the “Aryan” nonsense—exposed almost forty-five years ago by Huxley as a ridiculous error—has been accepted as a gospel in a Germany where even ethnologists do not know that the word merely designates a language-group and has nothing to do with blood or race. And that the Sumarians and other pre-Aryan families, to quote Professor Gordon Childe of the University of Edinburgh, created the civilization of which we are the heirs at a date when “the ancestors of the Ger-

mans and Anglo-Saxons were filthy savages, picking up shellfish on the shores of the Baltic. There is not a trace of Aryan elements in any sense among the creators of civilized life.”

Accepting even the Germans’ own theory of what constitutes an “Aryan,” the great majority of the people do not satisfy the requirements. In 1895 Professor Otto Ammon was gravely disturbed when his researches showed that only 1.45% of the inhabitants of Baden could be regarded as belonging to this alleged race.

Yet a highly educated nation has reached a point where it believes not only that “non-Aryans,” that is, in effect, Jews, not only never made any contribution to German civilization, but even that they are an unqualified evil, and that all of Germany’s misfortunes are due to them.

Here again the people’s historical heritage furnishes the explanation. No other country on earth has such a long record of persecution of the Jews as has Germany, going back to the first Crusade. Optimists who believe that Hitler may eventually modify some of the laws against this people have no conception of the extent to which the Germans’ minds have been poisoned against the Jews for nine centuries. Anti-Semitism, the chief point in the Nazi leader’s program, appealed to a greater part of the German people than did any other point. In almost every department of life the Jews were represented out of all proportion to their numbers. This was especially true in the arts, sciences and learned professions. Only 1% of the whole population consisted of Jews, but 28% of Germany’s Nobel Prize winners belong to that race. The explanation lies, of course, in the Jews’ greater intellectual alertness, persistence and energy, but a people taught to regard itself as the real Chosen People, and at the same time

burdened with the inferiority complex engendered by their long history of travail and disaster, could naturally not accept such a conclusion. For them the explanation lay in Jewish dishonesty, tricky and unfair dealing, and thus between three and four million Germans—for one-quarter of "non-Aryan" blood is as bad as 100%—have been reduced to the status of pariahs, with less rights than are enjoyed by foreigners, and many have been beaten, robbed or even murdered.

III

Another reason for the failure of the Germans to offer any opposition to the murderous Nazis is that they lack what has been elegantly termed "intestinal stamina." This may seem at first sight an astonishing assertion regarding a militaristic nation, but it is none the less true. The German will not fight when the situation becomes hopeless. When I went to Germany for the first time in 1911 I was much interested in pugilism, and took in many matches. I was astonished to see what a great number of them were ended by throwing up the sponge in the midst of the conflict. I had never seen an American pugilist give up, and instances of such quitting probably do not happen in America once in a hundred fights, but they are common in Germany.

When Great Britain entered the World War the Kaiser is reported to have said: "The English are tough opponents. They are so dumb that they don't know when they are licked, and they keep right on fighting."

Probably he did not say it, but he could well have done so, and this bulldog spirit marks the difference between the two peoples. A friend of my son's, a medical student, said to him:

"I don't mind fighting, but when I get hit so hard it hurts, I don't want to fight any more."

This young man—he is now a physician—epitomized in these words the attitude of his people. I have seen many blows struck in Germany, but I have never seen a man thus struck attempt to defend himself.

Perhaps the most striking testimony to this lack of the bulldog spirit is the accepting by Germany of a treaty containing the famous "war guilt paragraph," Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles. It is improbable that any other nation on earth would have signed such a document in any circumstances. Certainly America would not sign such a treaty, Great Britain would not, France would not, Poland would not, even little Ireland would not. But the Germans signed, and their lack of "intestinal stamina" has proved a curse not only for them, but for the whole world. There would have been no Hitler, no massacre of men and women at the order of this Twentieth Century Ivan the Terrible, if the alleged statesmen at Versailles had framed an intelligent treaty.

Back of the submission of the German people to Nazi rule lies, as the really dominant factor, the glorification of Authority, with its corollary, Obedience. Karl Friedrich von Moser (1725-1798) wrote in his essay, "Vom Nationalgeist": "Every nation has its great motive-principle. In Germany it is Obedience." This principle of obedience to authority rests on the German conception of the state. For politically enlightened nations the state exists for the people: for the Germans the people exist for the state. They have no rights as against the state, and the state is Authority, incorporated in its *Beamten*, its officials, from the head of the government down to the pettiest rural constable.

"To whom God gives office he gives also understanding" (*Wem Gott ein Amt gibt, gibt er auch Verstand*) says an old German proverb. Even when Germany had a civilized form of government, this belly-crawling submission to Authority reached, for free peoples, extraordinary and even laughable forms. The "Cobbler of Köpenick" will be recalled—the little shoemaker who donned the uniform of an army captain, commandeered a squad of soldiers and led them to the city hall in Köpenick, where he ordered the mayor to hand over the City's funds, dismissed the soldiers, and went home with the cash-box. The whole world laughed about it at the time, and even some unregenerate Germans also laughed—or were ashamed.

An "insult" to an official was much more severely punished than an insult to an ordinary citizen. One of the things that most impress—and delight—the newly arrived German immigrant in America is that he can call the President an ass or an idiot without being punished for it.

Under Hitler this glorification of Authority has reached heights unknown since the Eighteenth Century. In his speech before the Reichstag on July 13 last, in which he attempted a "justification" of the summary murder of seventy-seven men and women (and there were undoubtedly many more, for no official statement of this government deserves an iota of credence), he declared that he himself was "the supreme court" in such cases. During the trial of the men accused of burning the Reichstag, the attorney for one of the defendants made a timorous attempt to discredit the testimony of an official of the Department of Justice. The presiding judge interrupted him.

"It is unheard of," he said, "that the word of a German official should be discredited."

There can be no justice in a land where the word of a witness cannot be impeached because he is an official.

The Socialistic reforms instituted by Bismarck in a vain attempt to check the growth of the Social-Democratic party were a further step inclining the Germans to look to the state for everything. "Get yourself born: the state will do the rest," became the slogan, and the Germans became even a still more regimented people, who, apart from the routine of their daily occupations, look to Authority to manage everything for them.

IV

This crushing out of all initiative manifests itself constantly in happenings that amaze the beholder from a free country. Not long after I reached Berlin with my family in 1911, my wife and I were awakened one night by sounds of dissension in the Holsteinischestrasse in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, directly in front of our apartment. I looked out of the window and saw a man lying on the sidewalk, surrounded at a respectful distance of some twenty feet by a dozen men and women. I drew on my trousers over my night attire, stuck my feet into slippers, and went outside. The man on the sidewalk was only semi-conscious. I lifted him to a sitting posture, and discovered that his nose had been smashed in—by a blow with brass knuckles, as I afterward learned. He was bleeding profusely. I called to the bystanders to bring some water, and after I had repeated the demand two or three times one man brought a pitcher, handed it to me, and retreated to a safe distance. I washed the victim's face and got a little water between his teeth. After perhaps ten minutes a policeman appeared and took charge of affairs.

And then I learned that one of the bystanders was the victim's brother! He had left it to a foreigner, newly arrived and still speaking German with an accent, to look after his own flesh and blood.

So abject has the submission to Authority become that the German does not dare defend himself from assault. I have told above of seeing many blows struck, but none returned. The extent to which this goes is shown by many happenings.

Two or three years before the war a young woman was annoyed by a masher in the Friedrichstrasse in Berlin. Unfortunately for the masher, she was a member of a troupe of athletes, and she dropped him with an uppercut to the jaw. The man rose, called a policeman, and the young woman was arrested.

The judge fined her 25 marks for assault!

In 1912 my wife and I were returning home about midnight when we heard voices raised in the Mehlitzstrasse, in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. (I name these streets in order to give verisimilitude to a narrative which might otherwise seem "bald and unconvincing" to readers in a free country). Two men and their wives were using heated words. Suddenly one of the men began striking the other man's wife over the head with his walking stick. The husband of the woman attacked ran down the street crying: "Herr Schutzmann! Herr Schutzmann!" (Mr. Policeman! Mr. Policeman!)

In 1911, only a few weeks after I reached Berlin, an altercation arose in a subway car at a late hour in the night between a tall young man and a slight girl. Suddenly he darted across to her and struck her in the face. This was new for me, and I knocked the fellow into a corner and gave him a second blow for good measure.

"You will get off with me at the next

station and I'll have you arrested," he said between sobs.

"With the greatest pleasure," I replied.

A German standing behind me whispered: "Don't do it. You'll be fined heavily."

I could not believe it, but I took his advice—luckily, for he was right. There is no doubt that all the other passengers in the car regarded me as a low, brutal rowdy, who ought not to be permitted at large in a country with real *Kultur*. It is obviously easy to cow into submission people whose natural human reactions have thus been harnessed by Authority.

All these incidents—and they are but a few of the many I have personally witnessed in the last twenty-three years—are typically German. They illustrate strikingly how the Germans look to the state and its duly constituted authorities to do everything for them except eat, breathe, sleep and work. But they can be very punctilious in insisting that things be done by the competent authority. This was amusingly shown in Berlin less than a year ago. A drunken man was creating a disturbance in a restaurant, and the owner, intending to dial "K 1", the emergency police call, mistakenly dialed "K 2", the fire department's call. The fire department arrived and the situation was explained.

The drunken man refused to leave at the fire chief's order. It was his right, he declared, to be thrown out by the police, and he stood on his rights. So the police were called, the disturber of the peace was taken into custody in due form, and the firemen returned to their quarters.

But even a show of authority is at times sufficient to produce results. On April 1, 1933, it will be remembered, a nationwide boycott of all "non-Aryan" places of business was carried out. On that day I found a young Storm Trooper standing in front

of the entrance to a store where I wanted to buy something. He remained there although I made a movement to enter the place. I looked him in the eye, and said: "You have instructions, have you not, to use no violence?"

"Jawohl, Herr," he replied.

"I have no such instructions," I said. "Step aside."

He stepped aside with great celerity. Yet he had a sheath-knife on his hip, and he knew that any assault on a Storm Trooper had been made a felony by order of the Cabinet, the only law-giving body in Hitler's Germany.

A uniform of almost any kind, especially if a sword or dagger be worn with it, always inspires respect, and the same is true of civilian dress of a kind showing that the wearer belongs to "the better classes." When wearing a top hat, cutaway and striped trousers, I have never been addressed by a lesser title than *Herr Doktor*, and often as *Herr Baron*. The head game-keeper on a large estate in Eastern Germany, where I was shooting deer and partridges two years ago, insisted on addressing me as *Herr Baron* even after I had told him that I was a mere commoner. Any man invited by the *Gutsherr*, the owner of the estate, himself a nobleman, to shoot his game and be his house-guest could not be of smaller rank than baron for the game-keeper.

One of Hitler's professed aims is the abolishing of all class distinctions. Even if he should hold power for years longer than there is any possibility of his lasting, he will not and cannot succeed. Respect for *der bessere Herr* (the man of better class), for titles and for nobility and royalty is too deeply ingrained in the German character to make it possible for one or even two or three generations to undo the development of centuries.

V

In view of what I have set forth thus far, Hitler's accession to power should be more understandable. And there are other factors in his favor. One is the Germans' amazing lack of any self-critical faculty and of any sense of the ridiculous—and this is true of all parties and all sects. During the campaign preceding the elections to the National Assembly of 1919 the *Vorwärts*, the central organ of the Social-Democratic party, which had for decades been carrying on a rabid campaign against all churches and all religion, headlined an article:

"Women! Protect your religion! Vote for the Social-Democratic Party of Germany!"

Some months ago the Nazi government gave solemn assurances that there should be no more attacks by radio on Austria from Munich by Theodor Habicht. When the attacks continued and Austria protested, it was solemnly stated by Berlin that Herr Habicht's broadcasts were now meant "only for German hearers." The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, "coördinated" as soon as Hitler came to power, published on August 17, 1933, a report from Vienna that all Austrians carrying on anti-Austrian propaganda abroad would lose their citizenship, and that the property of political parties whose activities were prohibited in Austria would be confiscated. This was precisely what had been done in Germany, but the *Allgemeine* headlined its report indignantly:

"Deprivation of rights in Austria!"

Nazi Germany has thrown tens of thousands of men and women into concentration camps, where many of them were murdered and thousands beaten. Yet a common headline in the German newspapers has been:

"Unheard of outrages in Austria Nazis thrown into concentration camps!"

On May 2 last the main German radio station reported solemnly "a reign of terror" in the Saar district, and complained bitterly of prohibitions of newspapers there. Eighteen days later it was asserted from the same station that the head of the provisional Saar government "complains of terrorism while he himself brutally terrorizes the inhabitants." And Joseph Goebbels, the ineffable "Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda," has the effrontery to declare that the German press is not muzzled.

Any people but the Germans would either weep or laugh at all these things, but the Germans have been taught to believe what Authority tells them. The situation, by the way, is extraordinarily depressing for American and British wives of German citizens, who, themselves German by marriage, may neither weep nor laugh for fear of compromising their husbands, and who must also submit to seeing their children of tender age compelled to make long night marches with pack, or else, refusing to let them join the Hitler Youth, rob them of all chance to enter a university, since only students approved by the Nazis are permitted to enter the institutions of what is still called higher learning in Hitler's realm.

The reason for the Germans' failure to react to the bloody terrorism of their rulers as other peoples would react can also be found in their history of seventeen centuries of almost continuous warfare. This long preoccupation with war made the profession of arms—in other words, militarism—appear the highest calling for a man. The Germans of today are the natural heirs of that Frederick William I who is glorified as "the Soldier King," and of his son, Frederick the Great, who

despoiled the Empress Maria Theresa of some of her choicest provinces in a shameless war of conquest and took the province of Posen from helpless Poland. Building on this heritage, Hitler has brought militarism to heights that make the last Kaiser look like an extreme pacifist. It is this that makes the Nazis' Third Reich a menace to the peace of Europe and of the world.

The coarsening effect of militarism is probably responsible also for a marked obtuseness toward mental suffering. A Jewish woman whom I know heard her little boy praying: "Please, God, let me not be a Jew." This is a profoundly pathetic thing, but Germans to whom I reported it were not impressed. "The Jews have themselves to blame."

Another factor—and one which calls for a degree of charitableness in passing judgment on the Germans as a whole—is that the great masses do not know what is happening in their country nor in what light their rulers are viewed by the outside world. Their press is told not only what it may and may not print, but also what it must print. The condemnation of Hitler's speech in the Reichstag on July 13 last was universal in the civilized world, but here are some of the headlines over the German papers' foreign correspondents' reports:

"The World Admires the Leader"; "Strengthening of Hitler's International Authority"; "The Impression Abroad—The Leader Has Increased His Authority"; "Hitler's Position Stronger Than Ever Before."

German-language papers from other countries, especially Switzerland, are carefully watched and confiscated when they contain news or comments unfavorable to the Nazis. Frequently they are barred from Germany for weeks at a time. Until the official murdering of June 30 and the fol-

lowing days evoked a wave of horror and condemnation in the press of the whole world, the foreign-language newspapers had suffered rather less than those printed in German, but wholesale prohibitions of papers from almost all countries then followed. Hence the only way the Germans have of knowing what is happening is by word of mouth, and the country is so infested by spies, both volunteer and paid, and punishment is so certain and so drastic, that the colporteurs of such news risk their liberty or even their life.

Readers of any good newspaper in foreign countries know more about the happenings in Germany than is known to all but a comparatively very few Germans themselves. This is especially true as to the United States and Great Britain, where the people are kept in touch with German affairs by a news service which does high credit to the honesty and intelligence of the correspondents furnishing it.

But the end of Hitlerism will come, and it would come very soon, despite all the factors described, were it not for one further factor which cannot be lightly disregarded.

It is expressed by the anxious question, which I have heard literally hundreds of times from patriotic Germans who hate Hitler and all his works:

"Aber wenn Hitler geht, was dann?" ("But if Hitler goes, what then?")

Communism? Civil war? Chaos?

A people accustomed to freedom would not hesitate. But the Germans have never known freedom as it is known by politically enlightened peoples. The chief hope of civilization lies today in the steadily worsening economic situation in Germany. When Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked, but the Germans kick when they begin to have to draw in their belts. The revolution of November, 1918, was really a hunger revolt—nothing more. So also was the Kerevsky revolution in Russia in 1917. The Germans do not worry much about freedom, but any hungry people will fight for bread.

History is getting ready to repeat itself in Hitler's Third Reich. The only question is how long the martyrdom of this so great but so tragically misled and deceived nation must go on.